

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the case is the fact that the Soviets have suppressed any mention of the fact that Col. Penkovskiy is a career military officer, and have persisted in referring to him as a "scientific worker," which was in fact a "cover" position for Penkovskiy in his most recent military intelligence assignment. As a member of the GRU, Col. Penkovskiy was in fact a General Staff officer, and his friendships extended throughout the top echelons of the military establishment. The Soviet subterfuge and sensitivity on this point lends credence to persistent rumors that Col. Penkovskiy was a spokesman for a small but important group of Soviet military officers -- impatient and dissatisfied with Khrushchev's policies, particularly in regard to Cuba -- attempting to establish a private communications channel to the American Government.

If this theory is correct, further changes in top military positions can certainly be expected to follow the replacement of Marshal Zakharov and the arrest of General Serov. But it is a significant feature of the changed power structure in the USSR today that the regime is as afraid of the idea of a purge as are those who would be threatened by it. Khrushchev is faced with the problem of having to make widespread changes throughout the military establishment without letting rumors of another "Zakharovskiy" type purge arise lest he provoke the threatened military cadres into a pre-emptive coup d'etat attempt. In this connection, it should be noted that an early Soviet newspaper article on the Penkovskiy case went out of its way to assure its readers that no purge or reprisals would take place, and that Penkovskiy's family would be permitted to continue living in their luxury apartment (Izvestiya, 16 December

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1962). Such a treatment is unprecedented in Soviet press coverage of espionage cases.

This may also explain the recent spate of rumors concerning the possible return to active duty of Marshal Zhukov. The popular Zhukov, who was retired in disgrace for his "adherence to the anti-party group" of Molotov et al in 1957, is apparently to be dusted off and thrown as a sop to dissident officers who might be contemplating action against the regime. Khrushchev presumably hopes that this will buy him enough time to identify and deal with the officers involved one by one without incurring the grave risks of a purge.